

UNPUBLISHED HISTORY CONCERNING THE WAR

BY J. COLEMAN ALDERSON,
of Charleston, W. Va.

(The interesting article following was procured through the kindness and good offices of President George W. Stevens, of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company.)

The Beginning.
South Carolina seceded December 20, 1860.

Mississippi seceded January 9, 1861.

Florida seceded January 10, 1861.

Alabama seceded January 11, 1861.

Georgia seceded January 19, 1861.

Louisiana seceded January 25, 1861.

Texas seceded February 1, 1861.

Arkansas seceded May 6, 1861.

Tennessee seceded May 6, 1861.

North Carolina seceded May 21, 1861.

Virginia and Texas submitted the ordinance of secession to the vote of the people.

Virginia.
November 12, 1860, Governor John Letcher issued proclamation convening the General Assembly of Virginia in extra session.

January 7, 1861—General Assembly met in extra session in Richmond.

January 11, 1861—General Assembly passed an act providing for a convention of the people of Virginia.

February 1, 1861—Delegates elected to convention.

February 12, 1861—Convention assembled in the old Capitol at Richmond.

April 17, 1861—Convention adopted ordinance of secession.

May 23, 1861—People voted on ordinance of secession. Adopted by immense majority.

Sessions of Convention.

February 12th, 1861, first regular session began, and ended May 1st, 1861.

June 12th, 1861, adjourned session began, and ended July 1st, 1861.

November 12th, 1861, second adjourned session began, and adjourned never to meet again, December 6th, 1861.

This will ever be known as the "Secession Convention of Virginia." It was composed of the ablest legal statesmen who had ever assembled in the Capitol of the Old Dominion.

A large majority were elderly men, who had occupied positions of honor and trust in the councils of their State and nation, and had retired to the quiet shades of their loved homes, never expecting to be called again into public service. They loved the Union, their fathers had created and now their sons had met together for the last time to fight to perpetuate that Union they loved so well. Seven Southern States had already seceded. Virginia stood for the Union like a stone wall.

But the long pressure of these States and the young hot blooded element of the Convention, she steadily maintained her large majority against seceding. Three different committees had been sent to Washington to invoke the President Lincoln.

The Crisis.

Nothing definite was accomplished until after many anxious weeks, when, on April 11th, 1861, the President commanded Virginia's earnest appeal and the Confederate General Lee's appeal to go to Richmond as authority to negotiate with the Convention in its effort to hold the State in the Union. He had assured that Virginia would not withdraw from the Union if he would agree to furnish aid in the form of arms and powder to the seceding States which had done so.

That ever memorable Friday night, General Campbell met the Committee on Federal Relations in the east parlor of the old Ballard House of the Capitol. It was composed of nine of the most prominent and patriotic members who were opposed to secession. General Campbell stated the object of his mission and showed his authority from Mr. Lincoln's letter to the Convention. He promised that if Virginia would firm and not secede she would not be called upon to furnish aid in co-ordinating the States which had done so. When this announcement was made, its effect was electrical. A gray-headed, careworn statesman, as any men North or South, embraced each other and wept for joy that the Union had been preserved. This touching scene was related to me by ex-Governor Samuel Price, of Lewisburg, West Virginia, who was a distinguished member of the committee, but also by his eldest daughter and the daughter of Mr. Carrington, the proprietor of that noted hostelry who sat in the adjoining parlor and witnessed the whole proceeding through the partitioned between the two parlors.

It was agreed at the same time that Virginia would also use every honorable means to bring back the seceding States, and thus have the effect of preventing others from leaving the Union.

General Campbell returned to Washington on Saturday, April 15, and made his report that afternoon to Mr. Lincoln. He afterwards stated that "The President seemed greatly pleased at the success of his mission." His Secretary of State, Mr. William H. Seward, and one other prominent member of his cabinet, heard that same evening what had been done. They immediately called at the White House and violently opposed the concession which had been made or any other. They sat up late that night and eventually induced the President to disregard the agreement which had been made, and on Sunday morning, April 16th, he issued a decree that never to be forgotten order calling for 75,000 volunteers, not only to march across Virginia, but demanded that she furnish her full quota of troops to help do it. This declaration of Civil War struck Richmond like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky.

All the powers of earth could not resist that unexpected death blow. Pandemonium reigned throughout Virginia and the entire South. Thus the Mother of States and statesmen were forced to withdraw from that Union which she had aided in establishing with the blood of her patriots. This occurred on Monday, April 16th, at 4:15 o'clock, P. M. The civilized world knows and has felt the result. These same hoary-headed statesmen, who only three days before wept for joy at the assurance that the Union would

Contributions to this column are requested. Confederate veterans and other persons familiar with the history of the War Between the States. Notices of particular engagements and personal adventures are especially requested. All contributions should be sent to the Editor of the General Column, Times-Dispatch, Richmond, Va.

be saved, now wept bitter tears of disappointment. It has been stated that at the time the vote was taken there was not a dry eye in the Convention. States rights were tried in the home of all Southerners. They believed they had the right to peacefully withdraw from the Union when the Federal Government refused to protect their person and property. Even Mr. Lincoln endorsed this doctrine in his speech in Congress in 1858. The New England States had adopted special resolutions in two conventions for much less cause. One on account of the Louisiana purchase and the other when Texas was admitted into the Union. Simply for the reason that additional territory would be added to the South and she would continue to control the general government as she had done up to the election of Mr. Lincoln in 1860.

Honorable George W. Summers, justly called "The Daniel Webster of Western Virginia," and who had been tendered by Mr. Lincoln a seat on the Supreme Bench of the United States, was an able member of the Committee on Federal Relations, in that Secession Convention. He said in his official delivered in Wheeling in 1862 that "it was not the bring on Fort Sumter that carried Virginia out of the Union."

We went on steadily and firmly voting in the Convention under the constant announcement of its number, its success and final triumph. No man gave way. Our large majority was maintained on every resolution.

The Union men, those elected as Union men (most of them were) who ultimately gave way did so in a way upon the ground that Fort Sumter had been attacked. The pretext, cause for the secession was the proclamation of President Lincoln calling for 75,000 troops to march across the sacred soil of Virginia to make war on her southern sister States, which they (we) chose to announce and act upon as a declaration of war.

The convention was composed of 152 members, made up of the ablest body of men that ever assembled in Virginia. On the final ballot, April 17th, 1861, eighty-nine voted for secession, fifty-five voted against it, and eight did not vote. All of them have crossed over the river to the North, except Mr. Kingwood, West Virginia, was the last one. He died November 18, 1910, 57 years old.

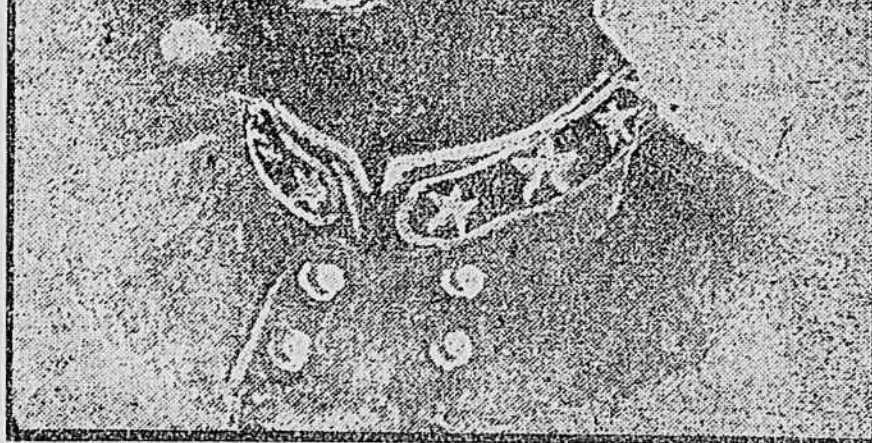
It is worthy of note, that the unfortunate dissolution of President Lincoln occurred on April 14th, 1865, five years after, and about the same hour that General Campbell and the Committee on Federal Relations signed the agreement referred to above.

The End.

I arrived in Lewisburg, West Virginia, on April 13th, from the surrender of General Lee on April 9th. The following day, I was conversing with Governor Price's family on his front porch, we noticed a man on horseback coming rapidly up the street. He halted at the front gate, and all of us, much excited, ran out to meet him. He wanted. He asked if Governor Price lived there. When informed that he did, he said he had an important document for the Governor from the President of the United States. I said Governor Price was not at home. I said lands farm, four miles from town. As his horse appeared very tired and I had a fresh one in the stable, and could take a short cut through the open country, I would be pleased to deliver the document.

He hesitated, saying he was ordered to deliver it to him in person, but when assured by the Governor's family that it would be perfectly safe, and I could deliver it much sooner than he could, he handed me the document in an envelope. I went as fast as my horse could carry me. I found the Governor at his barn cleaning wheat in an old-fashioned windmill, with two negro men assisting him. He had resuscitated two sacks of wheat which his negroes had buried in the barn floor to keep body and soul together during the occupancy of the Federal troops. They were forced to hide what little was left to subsist on. I dismounted, handed him the envelope, saying, "It is a message from President Lincoln." He quickly stepped out of the dust, and broke the seal with trembling hands. The whole country was terribly excited. Dire rumors of destruction and death were being circulated. We were warned to come back to the terms of surrender would be endorsed by the United States government. We knew that Mr. Lincoln's Cabinet, especially Secretaries Stanton and Seward, were very bitter and uncompromising towards the South, and that they had a remarkable influence over the President. It was reported by marauding bands of Federal cavalry, claiming to be gathering up Federal property, regardless of whether it was branded U. S. or not, that we would be banished from our impoverished homes, imprisoned or shot on the spot. As Governor Price read this letter, his eyes began to sparkle, and bright smiles lightened up his pleasant face, and handing it to me he said: "Coleman, good news, good news!" Turning quickly to one of his servants he said: "Sam, saddle my horse quick. I have good news for you." Though it has been over fifty-five years ago, that letter is indelibly engraved on my mind, and I repeat it here almost verbatim: "I desire you to proceed immediately to Richmond and convene your Legislature. Tell your members to come back to the President's terms, and hang up their hats on the same peg they hung them on before the war."

Though he was sixty years old, we returned to Lewisburg in a rapid gallop, arriving after sundown. He got a hot bath, a fresh horse, and rode all night thirty-nine miles to Jackson River Depot, near Clifton Forge. The old Virginia Central Railroad, now the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, had been completed only that far west at the beginning of the War between the States. The Governor took the morning train for Richmond to convene the Legislature. When he arrived at Staunton Hon. Sandy Stuart, who had been President Buchanan's Secretary of the Interior, Judge Hugh Shoffey, Colonel John B. Baskin, and Mr. Michie met him at the depot. They had heard he was coming. They informed him that President Lincoln had



BRIGADIER-GENERAL WILLIAM R. COX,
of North Carolina.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

April 10—President Davis instructs General Beauregard to demand the surrender of Fort Sumter, and to reduce it in case of refusal.

The Confederate Commissioners at Washington—Crawford, Rowan and Forsyth—presented to State Seward that a refusal to entertain the overtures of peace meant that the Confederate government is equivalent to a declaration of war against that government.

April 11, 2 P. M.—General Beauregard, through his aids, Stephen D. Lee and James Chesnut, Jr., makes a formal demand for the surrender of Fort Sumter by Major Anderson, who refuses.

April 12, 4:30 A. M.—Mortar battery of Fort Johnson fires the first gun of the war on Sumter.

April 13—Major Anderson surrenders to Lieutenant Winfield, and the flag of the United States is hoisted down.

April 14—Fall of Sumter widely celebrated, with manifestations of great joy. Church services of thanksgiving held. "Te Deum" sung in the Charleston Cathedral.

April 15—President Lincoln issues his proclamation calling for 75,000 volunteers and convening an extra session of Congress.

been assassinated the previous night. Governor Price returned home on the 10th of April. Soon after this followed the infamous "carpetbagging" of plunder and murder throughout the Southern States. This was the greatest calamity, not excepting the Civil War, that ever befell the South. She lamented Mr. Lincoln's death almost as much as the North, not so much because she loved him, but because she hated and feared Andy Johnson, who had betrayed her. Mr. Lincoln visited Richmond only two days before his death, and was received more cordially than he anticipated. He had already promulgated his generous and humane policy of reconstruction. The leading men of the South, who had been his friends, believed that he had lived long enough to see his policy carried out in every line of endeavor than she is to-day.

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